DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 261 548 FL 015 216

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TITLE Learning the Passive in Zulu.
INSTITUTION Stanford Univ., Calif. Dept. of Linguistics.
PUB DATE Aug 85
NOTE 8p.; Papers and Reports on Child Language Development, Volume 24, p131-37, Aug 1985. For related documents, see FL 202-215 and 217.
PUB TYPE Reports - Research/Technical (143)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Age Differences; *Child Language; Cognitive Development; *Grammar; *Language Acquisition; Learning Processes; Toddlers; *Verbs
IDENTIFIERS *Passive Voice; *Zulu

ABSTRACT

A study of the late acquisition of the passive in Zulu used data from transcripts of naturalistic speech gathered in a longitudinal study of several children's speech development between 1.10 and 3.6 years of age. It was hypothesized that the productivity of the passive construction in Zulu is a factor facilitating acquisition. A range of passivizing noun phrases were found in the data, and their relationships were expressed in wh-question routines initiated by the adult. The combination of the productivity of the passive and the extension of the passive form into wh-subject questions expressing recipient-of-action relations appears to influence early acquisition. Unlike some other languages, Zulu appears to have the right combination of factors for encouraging children to learn the passive. The findings suggest that late acquisition of the passive in other languages be reconsidered in light of a little-examined "got"-passive, which parallels the more commonly studied "be"-passive. It is suggested that the former may be very important in young children's speech, expressing adversitive passive situations, and that its early use may contribute to the late acquisition of the latter passive form. (MSE)

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ED261548

PRCLD 24 (1985)

LEARNING THE PASSIVE IN ZULU

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The passive is acquired late in many languages. Harwood (1959) reported that five-year old English-speaking children rarely used the full passive in spontaneous speech. Sinclair et al (1971) made similar observations about children learning French and German. In Hebrew, Ariel (1984) found that "children as old as eight consistently avoid passive constructions even when required by context." (In Berman (1984)) Rarity in children's speech is matched in adult input. In naturalistic speech, Brown (1973) observed that the passive is found found infrequently in adult input to children.

Since the passive rarely occurs in spontaneous conversation between adult and child, much of the research into the onset and development of the passive has been conducted through experimental studies. These studies have focussed on children's comprehension and production of different types of passives (Horgan (1978)), on the effect of modelling frequency on the number of passives produced (Whitehurst et al (1974)) and on strategies employed by children in understanding and processing passives (Bever (1970)).

This study is set against the background of previous research into the passive. In particular, we take as our point of departure the explanations given in the literature for late acquisition. It has been suggested that the passive is acquired late because of its low frequency in input, its structural complexity and the existence of structural alternatives.

Unlike many languages studied to date, Zulu and Bantu languages generally have a productive passive. One apparent source for the productive Bantu passive lies in the range of noun phrases which may passivize. In Zulu, noun phrases standing in patient(object), recipient(indirect object) and benefactive(indirect object)relation to the verb productively passivize. These are illustrated in the active and passive sentences in (1):

(1) Noun phrase arguments which passivize in Zulu

Active	Passive
a. Patient	
U-Jon u-theng-a izi-tsha	Izi-tsha zi-theng-wa {ng-u-Jon}
John he-buys dishes	Dishes they-buy for-Pass it is-John
John buys dishes	Dishes are bought by John
b. Recipient	
U-baba u-ph-a um-ntwana i-swidi	Um-ntwana u-ph-iwa i-swidi ù-baba
Father he-gives child sweet	Child he-give-Pass sweet it is-Father
Father gives a sweet to the child	The child is given a sweet by Father
c. Benefactive	
U-mama u-thel-el-a u-baba i-tiye	U-baba u-thel-el-wa i-tiye ù-mama
Mother she-pour-for Father tea	Father he-pour-for-Pass tea it is-M.
Mother pours tea for Father	Father is poured tea by Mother

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Languages such as French, German and Hebrew permit passivization on patient noun phrases only. In English, although recipient, benefactive and patient noun phrases passivize in the adult language, only patient noun phrases would tend to do so in adult speech to children.

In addition to having a productive passive as described above, Zulu also employs a passive construction in several syntactic constructions besides the true passive. It is used in wh-subject questions, object relatives with full noun subjects, a few verbs with active meaning and in stative adjectives. These extensions of the passive form into other syntactic domains is shown in (2)

(2) Extensions of the passive form into other syntactive environments

a. Who/what subject questions

1. U-w-is-wa yi-ni
   You-fall-caus-Pass it is-what
   What makes you fall?

2. U-gez-wa u-bani
   You-wash-Pass it is-who
   Who washes you?

b. Object relatives with full noun subjects

1. Izim-pahla e-zi-ntshontsh-we yi-sela zi-khona
   Goods Rel-they-steal-Pass it is-thief they-here
   The goods that the thief stole are here

c. Verbs with active meaning and passive form

1. khohlwa 'to forget'

d. Stative adjectives (truncated passives)

1. li-vul-iwe 'it is opened' (isango - gate)
2. a-vuth-iwe 'it is cooked' (amabele - millet)

In terms of child language development, passive-form wh-questions are the most prominent extension of the passive form into other domains. Adults use passive form questions in conversing with children as young as two. They also use the passive form stative adjective comments illustrated in d.

The combination of the productivity of the true passive and the extension of the passive form into other syntactic environments makes the passive a pervasive element in both the spoken and written language. Since languages with relatively restricted passives show late development of this construction, we hypothesized that a highly productive passive might expect to find variations on the generally observed late pattern of development for the passive.

Data for this paper was taken from transcripts of naturalistic Zulu speech taped in the course of a longitudinal study of several children's speech development between 1.10 and 3.6 years of age.

The passive construction in Zulu is comparable in formal complexity to its English counterpart. Figure (3) gives the rules of passive formation.

(3) Passive formation

a. Suffix /-w/ to the verb stem

b. Interchange subject and object noun phrases of active sentence.

c. Mark agent phrase with low tone on prefix, or prefix copulatives /yi/ or /ngu-/ to the agent noun.

Ex. Umama u-bona inja Inja i-bon-wa ngu-mama
Mother she-sees dog Dog it-see-Pass it is-Mother

The verb is marked, active word order changed and a grammatical element is prefixed to the agentive expression.

Passives in Zulu have a focussing function which is similar to that in English. In the example in (3), the focus shifts from the logical subject of the active sentence, umama, onto the derived subject, inja.

In discussing the passive in Zulu children's speech, we distinguish between the true passive and the passive form. Passive form is used in referring to the extensions of the passive form into other syntactic environments.

Adults used the passive form in a few recurrent who- and what-questions addressed to children under two years. A total of twenty wh-questions occurred in input to three children under two years. These interrogatives in passive guise occurred with the verbs given in (4):

(4) Passive-form wh-questions in input addressed to:

children under 2		Busanati (age 2.1)	
pha (8)	'give'	pha(2)	
thengela(3)	'buy for'	thengela(24)	
wisa(6)	'make fall'	wisa(10)	
lalisa	'put to sleep'	phatha(12)	'suffer from'
limaza	'hurt'	funa	'want'
geza	'wash'	khipha	'take out'
		shaya	'hit'
		phuza	'drink'
		dubula	'shoot'
		khahlela	'kick'
		khathalisa	'make tired'
		letha	'bring'
		qulisa	'make sick'
		vala	'close'

A few verbs occurred repeatedly in the input questions given in (5). Although adults varied in number and range of passive-form input question, they all employed this group of questions.

(5) Frequent input questions

Zulu	English gloss
a. u-phi-we ngubani	'who gave it to you'
b. u-thengel-we ubani	'who bought (it) for you'
c. u-wis-we yini	'what made you fall'
d. u-pheth-we yini	'what are you suffering from'

Many of these questions take recipient or benefactive noun arguments. The child himself is often the topic of the inputquestion; reference to the child is invariably in pronominal form. To respond the child has to name the thing or person who did something for him, or to him. Many of these early passive-form questions occurred in question 'packages' used by adults to sustain conversation with a young child. 'Packages' typically consisted of several questions organized upon the identity, whereabouts, ownership of and relation to the child of an object.

Children under two generally didn't understand these questions. After two, children began to respond appropriately to routinized passive-form input questions with mastery of passive-form answers

progressing in three general stages. They are given in (6):

(6) Stages in learning the passive form.

Input question: U(li)thengelwe ubani?		'Who bought it for you?'
I. Name agent noun only	ex. a.	uBoniwe (person's name)
II. Repeat input verb + agent	b.	Thengel(w)e uBoniwe
III. Person affect + verb + agent	c.	Ngi(li)thengelwe uBoniwe

In Stage II, the passive marker was optional and often elided across morpheme boundary. However, the passive segment /-w/ didn't appear to pose any problem for young children and appeared in the data after age two. As children mastered routined expressions like those in (5), adults varied the range of verbs in input (see (4), Busanati at 2.1). Even so, a large number of formulaic questions and answers persisted until children were about two and a half. In our data, passive form answers were predictable from passive-form input questions. Although these questions could be answered in active as well as passive form, children never gave active answers to interrogatives phrased in passive form.

After age two and a half, children became more active participants in conversation. There was a decrease in the number of formulaic exchanges between adult and child. As these question routines decreased in frequency, so did the frequency of passive-form utterances in children's speech. Between two and a half and three, subjects began to use passive forms which were not directly tied to adult input. They began to ask questions using this form; the questions were often the same stereotyped forms that they had encountered earlier in talking to caretakers, but now children were the initiators. A representative sample of more original passive-form comments in children's data is given in (7):

(7) Children's passives between 2.7 and 3.2 years

a. U-zo-bosh-iwe yezwa
   You-will-tie up-Pass you hear
   You will get tied up, you hear

b. Ngi-bosh-iwe
   I tie up-Pass(Past)
   I got tied up

c. Ng-wis-we ùMandla
   I-make fall-Pass (Past) it is-Mandla
   I was tripped by Mandla

d. Ng-shay-we ùMonde ngesimbi
   I-hit-Pass(Past) it is-Monde with a rod
   I got hit by Monde with a rod

There were relatively few of these statements. All children used the passive in the same restricted context. They were employed when referring to things that happened to them or to someone they knew. As the examples illustrate, most of these things were negative, adversitive events. These utterances were interpreted as true passive constructions. Although naturalistic data doesn't present the kind of testing situation where one analysis may be conclusively shown to be correct, our interpretation took into account the following facts. These utterances weren't tied to adult input. They showed some

productive mastery of passive forms. They were specific to one contextual situation where the child was talking about something bad that had happened to him. The child was the contextually foregrounded topic of the utterance. In terms of his total speech output, passives were relatively rare and he made many more active statements in talking about people and situations. Passives were clearly marked forms in children's speech.

Children did not employ the passive in any other context. The context-specific use of the passive may be seen in comparing adult and child use of language in talking about a situation where the passive would be expected to occur as a focussing device. Our data provided us with such a situation. In Zulu society, an animal is slaughtered on important family occasions. Typically, a goat is bought and slaughtered in preparation for a feast. The entire family including small children witness the event. The event made a strong impression on one of our subjects and she referred to it recurrently during a year of taping. We compared her account at 3.2 years with an adult version to see if the adult employed the passive in this context. Comparing two short accounts of the same story, we found significant differences between adult and child versions. In the adult account, there were six passives. Four of them were employed in referring to what happened to the goat, kuhlatshwa imbuzi 'the killing of the goat' (lit. it was killed the goat), ya fakwa 'it was taken', iyanqunywa 'it was slaughtered', ayigwazwa 'it wasn't stabbed'. The passive is used here in focussing on the theme of the narrative, the goat, as undergoer of the action. The helplessness of the goat is conveyed by using the passive. The child's story looked quite different. Although a fluent storyteller, her story of the goat being killed is recounted in a sequence of short, active sentences. Her use of the passive appeared to be restricted to adversitive passives in which she or someone she knew had something bad happen to them. The passive wasn't used as a general focussing device.

In tracing the development of passives in children's speech, we have distinguished between two types of verbal construction, shown in (8). The verbal in (8)a. is a morphological form which happens to be in passive form. The examples in (8)b. are true passives.

(8) Verbal constructions

a.	Uphethwe yini?	'What's wrong with you?'
	Thengelwe ùbaba	'Bought by Father'
	Uphiwe ùbani?	'Who bought it for you?'
b.	Unana ugezwa ùNqoba	'The doll was washed by Nqoba'
	Iyanqunywa ùbaba	'It was slaughtered by Father'

Passive forms originate in children's speech in conversational routines. Children are learning essentially idiosyncratic constructions with particular morphological features. However, we would argue that these expressions are more than rote-learned forms. They also encode recipient-of-action situations. From an adult's point of view, the routinized questions of (5) were employed because they engaged the child's attention in talking about himself. These questions related situations to the child. He was the recipient or beneficiary

of some action initiated by someone else. Due to language specific properties of Zulu, this situation is grammaticalized with the passive. It suggests that we have here a prototypical situation as discussed by Slobin (1981). "The way into grammar involves attention to both prototypical situations in the world of reference and canonical forms in the world of language." (p. 185) He argues that certain situations have high salience for children and that they learn the grammatical forms that encode them. In the majority of the passive forms found in adult and child speech in our data, we found encoding of the semantic notion, recipient-of-action, in situations involving the child.

The coincidence of the passive form and the statement of recipient-of-action relations is a language specific factor. The child learns the passive form in recipient-of-action situations. It suggests that the Zulu child perhaps has earlier access to the syntactic and semantic complexities of the passive than children may have in other languages. The extension of the passive form into other syntactic domains appears to be a factor encouraging early acquisition of the passive. Recipient-of-action is a notion implicit in the passive construction and in learning how to answer routine questions about himself, the child has access to part of the semantics of the passive as well.

We hypothesized at the beginning of this paper that the productivity of the passive construction in Zulu might be a factor facilitating acquisition. We found a range of noun phrases passivizing in the data with nouns standing in patient, recipient and benefactive relations to the verb. These relations were expressed in the wh-subject question routines initiated by the adult. The combination of the productivity of the passive and the extension of the passive form into wh-subject questions expressing recipient-of-action relations appear to influence early acquisition. Moira Chimombo (personal communication) reports that Chichewa speaking children do not use the passive at a young age. Chichewa has an even more productive passive than Zulu does, but it is not frequently used in wh-subject questions. Zulu appears to have the right combination of factors for encouraging children to learn the passive.

In conclusion, we would like to reconsider the issue of late acquisition of the passive in other languages. Research into the development of the passive in children's speech has primarily investigated the BE-passive. There is a parallel GOT-passive which has been relatively poorly studied. It seems, however, that this GOT-passive may be quite important in young children's speech. Turner and Rommetveit (1967) found that four-year old children used the GOT-passive in preference to the BE-passive in production tasks designed to encourage the use of the passive. They noted: "As the passive-voice sentences which were presented to the child by by the Experimenter used the standard English "to be" as the auxiliary, the possibility cannot be ruled out that some of the errors made in the processing of the passive voice resulted from the use of a passive verb form which the children do not usually use, or which they use infrequently until they are taught it at school".

The finding of late acquisition of the passive may be due to an emphasis on research into the BE-passive rather than the GOT-passive. Clearly, this is an area where more research is needed. The GOT-passive appears to be used in adversitive passives where the recipient (undergoer)-of-action is adversely affected by or suffers from the actions caused by another. In our data, children's first original passives (7) were all examples of adversitive situations. Adversitive passives involve the notion of recipient-of-action as well as a focus on a person (usually the child) who is adversely affected. Most of what is involved is not language specific. Recipient-of-action is a universal semantic notion. We could anticipate that children would find the means for expressing this notion regardless of language structure. Foregrounding and a means of expressing adverse situations may be expected to be part of the three year old's knowledge. Perhaps a closer examination of how these notions are expressed in adult and child language in interaction may revise current evaluations about when the passive is learned. One may find that the passive is used productively in 'limited scope formulas' at a younger age than is generally reported.

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